



Terrible Kosovo precedent poisoned relations with Russia

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In an article published under the headline, "How Kosovo poisoned America's relationship with Russia," he asserted that the war repeated and deepened the mistake the West made several years earlier when it intervened in Bosnia.

"Civil strife in Serbia's restless, predominantly Albanian province, simmered and then flared in the mid-and late-1990s. This time, Washington didn't even make a gesture of deferring to the leading European states, but took the policy lead early on," Galen, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a contributing editor to the National Interest, said.

Ultimately, the United States led a 78-day air war against Serbia, "compelling Belgrade to relinquish control to a largely NATO occupation force operating under a fig-leaf resolution that the UN Security Council approved."

Russia reluctantly acquiesced to that peacekeeping resolution, "despite Moscow's ties to Belgrade and Russian interests in the Balkans going back well into the 19th century," he observed.

"That step reflected Russia's military, economic and diplomatic weakness following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Despite anger at NATO's policy, there was little Russian leaders felt they could do in response to the West's intrusion into a traditional Russian sphere of influence. Even with Moscow's surprisingly passive response, though, Washington's arrogance nearly produced a tragedy," Carpenter writes, and explains:

"In the closing days of the fighting, Moscow dispatched a token peacekeeping contingent to Kosovo, without prior authorization from the Western powers. NATO's supreme commander, US Army Gen. Wesley Clark, ordered the British commander on the scene, Gen. Mike Jackson, to seize the airport outside Kosovo's capital, Pristina, and prevent the Russian troop planes from landing - by force, if necessary. Jackson flatly disobeyed Clark's order, stating bluntly that he wasn't going to start World War III for the American general."

The intervention in Kosovo "set some terrible precedents," he continued.

"A supposedly defensive U.S.-led alliance attacked a country that had not attacked any NATO member, disregarded Moscow's angry protests, and forcibly detached the province of a

sovereign country, placing it under international control. That set of worrisome precedents was compounded by the actions that the United States and its allies took in early 2008. Kosovo wanted to declare its formal independence from Serbia, but it was clear that such a move would face a certain Russian (and probable Chinese) veto in the UN Security Council. Washington and an ad hoc coalition of European Union countries brazenly bypassed the council and approved Pristina's independence declaration."

Russia's leaders protested vehemently and warned that the West's unauthorized action established a dangerous, destabilizing precedent, Carpenter said - but Washington "rebuffed such complaints, arguing that the Kosovo situation was unique."

"The Western powers soon discovered that merely because they said their action in Kosovo established no precedent, that did not make it so" - as Russia "demonstrated that point just a few months later" in Georgia.

"The Kosovo precedent came back to haunt the United States again in 2014 when the Kremlin enhanced its military presence on the Crimea Peninsula and used it to 'supervise' a referendum in which Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine. That step was a prelude to Russia's annexation of the peninsula. Washington reacted with even greater anger than it had following Moscow's invasion of Georgia, soon imposing an array of economic sanctions against Russia. At a press conference, President Obama fumed that Russia could not be allowed to redraw 'the borders of Europe at the barrel of a gun.' None of the journalists in the room asked the president what he thought NATO had done in Kosovo," Galen writes.

He considers the Kosovo intervention "an even worse U.S. foreign-policy blunder than the earlier intervention in Bosnia."

"It empowered an extremely unsavory political movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army, which proceeded to commit an array of human-rights abuses," and "transformed NATO from a defensive military alliance into a mechanism for aggressive nation-building crusades."

"Forcibly amputating the territory of a sovereign state created a worrisome template in the post-Cold War international system," Carpenter writes.

"And last, but certainly not least, the actions of the United States and its NATO allies in Kosovo further poisoned relations with Russia. In every respect, the U.S.-led Kosovo mission was unwise and counterproductive," he concludes.